

THE CHURCH'S SONG SERVICE/ TIPS FOR SONG LEADERS

Updated May 30, 2007 (first published March 15, 2004) (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

As I have traveled across the world and preached in hundreds of churches, I have had the privilege of participating in many truly spiritual and enthusiastic song services. A spiritual song service is a great blessing, but the sad truth of the matter is that they are more the exception than the rule.

I have loved congregational singing since I was a boy growing up in a Southern Baptist church. That church had bi-annual all-day services. After the morning service we would have “dinner on the ground.” All of the ladies would bring their tastiest dishes and we would have a real feast. It was called “dinner on the ground” because, weather permitting, it was held outdoors on large picnic tables, and since I grew up in Florida, weather often permitted this 12 months out of the year. Later in the afternoon we would congregate back in the church auditorium and have a “sing in.” Sometimes quartets and groups would attend and provide some of the music, but my favorite part was the congregational singing. They would take favorites and just sing and sing and sing. I wasn’t even saved at the time, but I loved those old songs. I turned my back on the things of the Lord in my teenage years and spent many years away from Him, but after I repented toward God in 1973 and began to attend church of my own accord as an adult, I have continued to love congregational singing.

All too often, though, the song service is dull and lifeless and ritualistic. There are many reasons for this serious problem.

SOME REASONS WHY SONG SERVICES BECOME LIFELESS

1. LIFELESSNESS CAN BE A REFLECTION OF SPIRITUAL DEADNESS

“Public worship is only the manifestation of private worship. The reason our public services are dead is that our private devotional life is dead” (Tim Fisher, *The Battle for Christian Music*, p. 108).

In many instances song services are dull because so many of the members sing only half-heartedly, if at all. All too often is obvious that many don’t have their minds on the service. In many cases, if someone really desires to lift up his or her voice in praise to God, people look at him like he is strange. Too often we are just going through a religious ritual with our song services. It might as well be a Latin mass. The words are merely being mouthed without consciousness of the glorious message of the lyrics and without heart-felt enthusiasm toward God. This is a great sin. It is dangerously close to “having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof,” which is a mark of apostasy (2 Timothy 3:5). Is it not an evidence of having left our first love (Revelation 2:4)?

2. LIFELESSNESS CAN BE CAUSED BY TREATING THE MUSIC AS A RITUAL TO BE “GOTTEN THROUGH.”

The fact that song services are often mere rituals is evident in many ways. It is evident by the aforementioned half-hearted manner with which we sing the songs. The ritualism of many song services

is further evidenced by the haphazard manner in which the songs are sung. Though there is no obligation that a church sing every stanza of every song, all too often it is evident that the reason certain stanzas are sung is not because the lyrics of those particular stanzas have been carefully selected, *but because that is the ritual and no serious thought and preparation has been given to it!* Many times the third stanza is necessary to complete the message of the song. Why skip it? All too often the candid answer would be, “Because that is how we do it, and we don’t think about it any more deeply than that.”

I once thanked Bro. McNeily, one of the song leaders at Fairhaven Baptist Church in Chesterton, Indiana (and a teacher at Fairhaven Baptist College), for singing all of the stanzas of the songs and hymns at a conference I attended there. His reply was informative. He said simply, “We are in no hurry.” Amen. Why are we seemingly in such a hurry with our song services? Is it not, too often, because it is merely a ritual that we are rushing through with almost no thought or heart-felt involvement?

The ritualism might also be reflected in the “stand up, sit down” routine. All too often there is no good reason for standing.

“It seems that no one likes a church when they are constantly being asked to stand for something, to sing a song, to pay tribute to something, etc. One or two standings per service is about all you can get by with and not alienate some people. There is usually a groaning when people have to stand too much. People plan to get their exercise in other ways. Besides, it is extremely hard on elderly and crippled persons. Some churches that we’ve noticed have the congregation stand at the opening of the service for a few songs. It is felt that standing improves the singing and creates a more enthusiastic service. People generally cooperate, but it’s very obvious that many are disgruntled by having to stand. It is hard to win a soul that is irritated. So it behooves us all to make the church service as enjoyable as possible for everyone. And if you take a poll you’ll find very few are for standing. Since it’s felt that people sing better if they are standing up, if the song leader can’t get the people to sing well enough sitting down, then change song leaders” (Bob Hinds, *Double Your Church Attendance*, p. 52).

I agree with this observation. I love congregational singing, but I personally find it very distracting and uncomfortable to have to stand through most of the songs. It is so much more pleasant to be able to sit down and sing to the Lord and meditate upon the wonderful words of the hymns. I have always thought it is strange for song leaders to force the people to stand and sing. On midweek services people have worked all day and are tired. Why can’t they be allowed to come to church and sit down and relax while they sing the songs of Zion?

A challenge about congregational singing was given by Henry Halley, author of the *Halley’s Bible Handbook*: “The dearth of congregational singing is the greatest lack in the average Sunday morning church service. There ought to be ten times as much as there is. Omit some of the show-off stuff in the choir loft, and make time for it. A continuous song service is better than one that is continuously interrupted with remarks by the leader, or the reading of a stanza, or by other parts of the service. That ruins the effect. Do nothing but sing, for twenty or thirty minutes, so as to give it a chance to make its impression.”

3. LIFELESSNESS CAN BE CAUSED BY AN IMPROPER CHOICE OF SONGS AND A FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF THE SONG SERVICE.

Ephesians 5:19 gives two basic purposes for Christian singing: “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” One purpose is to exhort and encourage and instruct one another in Christ, and the other purpose is to praise the Lord. The songs and hymns in a standard hymnbook in Baptist churches can be grouped into one of these general categories.

In this light, the choice of songs is very important. There is not a lot of genuine worship to God if we sing songs like “Church in the Wildwood,” with its nostalgic but over simplistic message, or if we sing something that contains actual doctrinal heresy, which some of the popular songs and hymns do, or if we sing songs that most people do not understand without explaining the lyrics. God must be worshipped in truth. “I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Corinthians 14:15).

If we are going to worship God in song we have to use songs that are worshipful. This is allegedly the purpose of standing for some or all of the song service, but too often the songs that are selected having nothing to do with worship.

A proper selection of songs and hymns is therefore basic. The song leader must understand the purpose of the various songs and hymns and make a wise, Spirit-led choice for each service.

4. LIFELESSNESS CAN BE CAUSED BY UNQUALIFIED AND UNPREPARED LEADERS AND MUSICIANS.

The position of song leader is important. Just as orchestras need effective conductors and armies need effective officers, churches must have the right song leaders if they are to have effectual song services. An individual can worship God alone effectively if he is so inclined, but a congregation must be led. That is why God has ordained leaders and has set forth high qualifications for them. It is true that the New Testament does not spell out the position of song leader or music director, but the Old Testament plainly sets forth this pattern and there is no need to restate it in the New. Sanctified common sense dictates its necessity.

“And Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, was for song: he instructed about the song, because he was skilful” (1 Chronicles 15:22; see also 1 Chronicles 25).

In Israel the music associated with the worship of Almighty God was carefully prepared and skillfully performed with godly oversight. We should have no less in the churches of Jesus Christ. Yet all too often the song service is led by individuals who know almost nothing about what they are doing and/or do not have the enthusiasm and spirituality to do the job.

No wonder many are tempted to go to a church that has an enthusiastic contemporary worship service. No wonder young people often think of church as dull. I received an e-mail recently from a woman who informed me that her family left an independent Baptist church that was lifeless and boring and that they are now happy members of a lively, contemporary Southern Baptist congregation. I wonder how many people have turned away from the truth because it was presented in an incredibly boring manner!

Friends, church does not have to be boring, and the godly solution is not found in the contemporary direction!

If a church is young and the congregation small, it is understandable that there might not be proper musicians and song leaders. No one expects a young church to have everything that a more established church can have. Under such conditions, the church must do the best it can with what it has. We are referring here to established churches that could do better in this department but don't simply because it is not a priority.

5. LIFELESSNESS CAN BE CAUSED BY IGNORANCE ABOUT MUSIC.

Oftentimes the chief problem with a church's music program is simple ignorance. In these cases, the pastor does not understand music himself, and he does not provide training for someone who is qualified to direct the music. This is understandable in a new work with a small membership, but the pastor should make it a priority to see that a properly trained, spiritually qualified individual is set over the music as soon as possible. If no one is currently available, there is not a lot one can do but pray and be patient. Frequently, though, the problem is a lackadaisical attitude toward church music so that it is not made the priority in prayer and planning that it should be.

For those who speak English there is no excuse for ignorance about spiritual music and effective song leading. There is a wealth of good material available. At the Way of Life web site we have a list of such materials in the article on "Helpful Music Resources." This can be found in the Music section of the Apostasy database -- <http://www.wayoflife.org>.

There should be continual education in the church pertaining to music, both positive and negative. We should be continually warning of the danger of worldly music and continually educating on the nature of spiritual music. New members are coming into the church and young people are growing up who need to be trained; and people forget what they learned a few years ago. In fact, they forget it much quicker than that!

6. LIFELESSNESS CAN BE CAUSED BY LACK OF VARIETY AND IMAGINATION.

All too often there is little or no imagination and serious preparation given to the music service. The same songs are sung every service. "Victory in Jesus" is a wonderful song, but when it is sung every week for fifty years, even a wonderful song can grow tiresome! There are hundreds of songs in the hymnbooks, but many churches sing only a few of them. Variety is the spice of life, dear friends. The largest book in the Bible is Psalms, and God has provided 150 different psalms in this inspired hymnal.

In the following section on song leading we give some tips for introducing variety into the service.

MARKS OF GOOD SONG LEADING

1. LEADERSHIP

Good song leaders lead rather than follow. Some song leaders seem to think that their only job is to announce the song numbers. Actually their job is to lead the congregation in singing unto the Lord, and that entails many things. They should lead out with their voices and with their enthusiasm. They should lead by teaching the people how to sing properly unto the Lord and by explaining the message of difficult songs. They should lead by introducing variety into the services, and in many other ways. It is said that "everything rises and falls on leadership," and there is great deal of truth to that. Consider the following

examples from the Psalms. Note how the Psalmist exhorts the people to sing and praise God with him. He does not berate or scold. He encourages and instructs and leads, reminding the people why they should praise the Lord.

“Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness” (Psalm 30:4).

“O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together” (Psalm 34:3).

“Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. 7 For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding” (Psalm 47:6-7).

“Exalt the Lord our god, and worship at his holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy” (Psalm 99:9).

“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands” (Psalm 100:1).

“O give thanks unto the Lord; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works” (Psalm 105:1-2).

“Praise ye the Lord, O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever” (Psalm 106:1).

“Praise ye the Lord. Praise, O ye servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord” (Psalm 113:1).

“O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us; and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord” (Psalm 117:1-2).

“Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the name of the Lord; praise him, O ye servants of the Lord” (Psalm 135:1).

“Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely” (Psalm 147:1).

“Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints” (Psalm 149:1).

“Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. ... Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord” (Psalm 150: 1, 6).

2. PREPARATION

The song leader represents the church and Jesus Christ, and he should therefore be well prepared. He should be prepared week by week by prayerfully seeking the Lord's will for the service, by choosing the songs prayerfully and wisely, by preparing his own heart before the Lord.

He should also prepare himself by doing all he can to learn how to be a better song leader. (There are materials that can help with this. See “Helpful Music Resources” at the music section of the Apostasy database at the Way of Life web site -- <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/helpful.htm>.)

It is not absolutely necessary that the song leader be able to read music, but it is a great advantage if he can. Learning how to read music it is not that difficult if a person is willing to make the necessary effort.

He should be prepared by studying the lyrics to songs and hymns and even the backgrounds to the songs. Pastor Ken Shaver, Greater Cumberland Baptist Church, Hopkinville, Kentucky, has led singing in large churches. He observes: “Another thing that I would mention is how important it is to learn the story behind the song. Knowing that H.G. Spafford wrote ‘It is Well’ after his children drowned in a shipwreck and that ‘Amazing Grace’ represents the testimony of a former slave trader, I believe adds so much depth to the songs. *101 Hymn Stories* and *101 More Hymn Stories* by Kenneth W. Osbeck (Kregel Publications) are both excellent publications.”

The song leader should also be prepared by understanding how to discern the difference between sacred and contemporary music. (Again, there are materials that can help with this. See “Helpful Music Resources” at the music section of the Apostasy database at the Way of Life web site -- <http://www.wayoflife.org>.)

3. EDIFICATION

1 Corinthians 14 is about church services and spiritual gifts, and the theme is edification. Twenty times in that chapter we find the words “edify,” “know,” and “understand.” Paul says, “Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor. 14:26).

This means that music used in church services should not be for entertainment. That is not the purpose of church services. The objective is spiritual edification.

According to Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, our music should minister in three directions: toward the Lord (Eph. 5:19), toward ourselves (Eph. 5:19), and toward others (Col. 3:16).

This means that each song should be selected because of its message. If the message is weak, there is little or no edification.

Further, if the message of the song is spiritual but couched in words that are not understood by the congregation, there is still no edification. Many of the old hymns use words that must be explained. The song “Beulah Land,” for example. What is Beulah? Unless the people know the meaning of that word, the song will be nearly meaningless. There is the same problem with “Here I raise mine Ebenezer, hither by thy help I’m come” in the song “Come Thou Fount.” The song “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” contains these words: “Lord Sabaoth is His name, from age to age the same...” Unless the people know what Sabaoth means, they will not be edified by that part of the song.

It is the song leader’s job to explain such things in a concise manner. I don’t mean that he takes 10 minutes to discuss each song. That can become tedious and can discourage the people. The song service is not about the song leader explaining things; it is about actually singing the songs of Zion to one another and to the Lord (Eph. 5:19). The song leader must be careful that he not interpret the service

continually with lengthy testimonies and discussions, but it is important to take a moment to define lyrics that might not be understood and to briefly reinforce the message of the songs.

The people need to be taught and reminded to think about the words of the songs. No matter how spiritual the songs are, if the people are not meditating on the message, no edification is accomplished. It is a song leader's job to lead the people in this matter, to help them focus their attention, not to berate them but to encourage and lead them.

Something as simple as this can do the job: "Folks, let's sing unto the Lord today. Let's put aside the cares of life and turn out hearts to Christ. Let's think about the words of these glorious songs and let's let the message sink down into our hearts."

4. SPIRITUALITY

The Lord Jesus Christ said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:24).

Our song services should be spiritual. The music should not please the flesh, should not be worldly. In this day when the world's music is creeping into the Lord's house, song leaders must be on guard continually against this type of thing. If it sounds like the world's dance or sensual entertainment music, it is not fitting for the house of God!

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15-16).

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

5. TRUTH

Not only are we to worship God in spirit but also in truth (John 4:24). Thus all of the songs should be doctrinally sound, should conform to the truth of God's Word. The song leader should go through the lyrics of each song, making sure that it is preaching truth. This is true for the older hymns as well as for the newer ones. For example, the chorus to the song "We've a Story to Tell to the Nations" says, "For the darkness shall turn to dawning, and the dawning to noonday bright, and Christ's great kingdom shall come to earth, the kingdom of love and light." The second verse says, "We've a song to be sung to the nations that shall lift their hearts to the Lord, a song that shall conquer evil and shatter the spear and sword." That presents the unscriptural post-millennial view of prophecy, that the return of Christ's kingdom will be gradually brought in as the gospel overthrows the evils of this world. The song "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" by Charles Wesley has the Methodist doctrine of a second blessing and entire sanctification in the second verse: "Let us find that second rest; take away our bent to sinning..."

An example of a popular contemporary song that contains false teaching is "Majesty." The author, Jack Hayford, is a popular Pentecostal preacher who believes in tongues speaking, healing in the atonement and such, and his song reflects his theology. The song says, "Majesty, kingdom authority..." What is this

kingdom authority? It is the unscriptural charismatic doctrine that believers have apostolic authority here and now.

Thus the song leader must ever be on his guard against false doctrine, so that we are worshipping God in truth.

6. ENTHUSIASM AND A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

There is no reason why our song services should be boring, and the song leader has a lot of responsibility in this regard. If he has no enthusiasm and leads in a boring manner, the congregation will probably reflect that.

Pastor David Earnhart of Fundamental Baptist Church, Escondido, California, who has been in the ministry for many years, observes: "I ALWAYS avoid scolding the crowd for not singing! That only makes them resent me! You must give them a positive reason (surely there are many!) for singing heartily. And repeating old clichés ('Folks, lets just raise the roof on this verse') SOON becomes old, and does not work. The song leader must help interpret the meaning of the song and why it should be sung with enthusiasm. That always brings better results."

7. WISDOM

An important part of a song leader's job is choosing the songs, and this requires that he understand the different categories and purposes of the songs. Ephesians 5:19 gives two basic purposes for Christian singing: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." One purpose is to exhort and encourage and instruct one another in Christ, and the other purpose is to praise the Lord. There are songs directed toward man and others directed toward God. The songs and hymns in a standard hymnbook in Baptist churches can be grouped into one of these general categories.

SONGS DIRECTED TOWARD MAN

Songs of Exhortation

Take the Name of Jesus With You
There Is Power in the Blood
We'll Work Till Jesus Comes
We're Marching to Zion
Will Jesus Find Us Watching?
God Will Take Care of You
God Leads Us Along
Jesus Never Fails
In Times Like These
His Way With Thee (Would you live for Jesus)
Is Your All on the Altar?
Yield Not to Temptation
Trust and Obey
Take Time to Be Holy

Tell It To Jesus
Make Me a Channel of Blessing
Our Best
Count Your Blessings

Songs of Encouragement

Sweet By and By
Face to Face
There'll Be No Dark Valley
My Savior First of All
Where We'll Never Grow Old
Beulah Land
When We All Get to Heaven
He the Pearly Gates Will Open
Saved by Grace
When He Cometh
Is It the Crowning Day?
Some Golden Daybreak
Just When I Need Him Most
Does Jesus Care?
Day by Day
Near to the Heart of God
All the Way My Savior Leads Me
'Til the Storm Passes By
Each Step I Take
Anywhere With Jesus
Never Alone
Trusting Jesus
Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary

Songs of Commitment

Where He Leads I'll Follow
Wherever He Leads I'll Go
If Jesus Goes With Me
Living for Jesus
Higher Ground
Give Me Jesus

Songs of Evangelism

Room at the Cross for You
Kneel at the Cross
Are You Washed in the Blood?
There Is Power in the Blood
There Is a Fountain

Look to the Lamb of God
Ye Must Be Born Again
Whosoever Will
Look and Live
Christ Receiveth Sinful Men
Jesus Saves
He Is Able to Deliver Thee
Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus
The Light of the World Is Jesus
Verily, Verily
Once for All
Honey in the Rock
Jesus Is Calling
Have You Any Room for Jesus?
Through Out the Lifeline

SONGS DIRECTED TOWARD GOD

The second broad category is that of “singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” There are four basic types of worship songs and hymns that come under this category: (1) those with lyrics that are directed to God or in direct praise about God; (2) those that are meditative and that reflect upon God; (3) those that are testimonies about God, and (4) those that are prayers to God.

Worship Directed to God or in Direct Praise about God

Glory to His Name
I Need Thee Every Hour
Lead Me to Calvary
Jesus, Lover of My Soul
Rock of Ages
Come, Thou Almighty King
To God Be the Glory
Our Great Savior
All Hail the Power
My Jesus, I Love Thee
Jesus! the Very Thought of Thee
Jesus, I Am Resting
Great Is Thy Faithfulness
O Worship the King
To God Be the Glory

Meditative Worship about God

What a Wonderful Savior
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
Jesus Paid It All
Near the Cross

Blessed Redeemer
One Day
The Old Rugged Cross
At the Cross
And Can It Be That I Should Gain?
Nothing but the Blood
Wounded for Me
In the Garden
Alas and Did My Savior Bleed?
Hallelujah for the Cross
He Lives
I Know That My Redeemer Liveth
Like a River Glorious
He Hideth My Soul
All That Thrills My Soul
No One Ever Cared for Me Like Jesus
Blessed Be the Name
I Am His, and He Is Mine
Jesus Is the Sweetest Name I Know
It's Just Like His Great Love
The Love of God
He Is So Precious to Me
No, Not One!
The Lily of the Valley
If I Gained the World

Some hymns are a combination of encouragement to the believer and worship directed to God. "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us" is an example of this. The lyrics are all directed to Christ, and sometimes they remind us of his tender care and sometimes they are pure worship: "Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus, Thou hast bought us, Thine we are..."

Worshipful Testimony

These are in the category of worship to God because the believer's testimony is all of God and because of His love and grace.

My Faith Has Found a Resting Place
My Anchor Holds
Leaning on the Everlasting Arms
A Shelter in the Time of Storm
The Heaven of Rest
I Know Whom I Have Believed
Blessed Assurance
We Have an Anchor
It Is Well With My Soul
The Solid Rock
Love Lifted Me

My Savior's Love
Such Love
Wonderful, Wonderful Jesus
He Keeps Me Singing
I Will Sing the Wondrous Story
Since Jesus Came into My Heart
My Redeemer
Only a Sinner
Grace Greater Than Our Sin
Wonderful Grace of Jesus
He Included Me
Built on the Rock
Surely Goodness and Mercy
Jesus Is All the World to Me
A Child of the King
Moment by Moment
Christ Liveth in Me
Nor Silver Nor Gold
Hallelujah, 'Tis Done
A New Name in Glory
The Cleansing Wave
I Love to Tell the Story
Since I Have Been Redeemed
The Old Account Settled
Amazing Grace
Saved, Saved!
Redeemed
Saved by the Blood!
Now I Belong to Jesus

Prayers to God

Come, Thou Fount
Whiter Than Snow
Open My Eyes, That I May See
My Faith Looks Up to thee
Take My Life, and Let It Be
More Love to Thee
Just a Closer Walk with Thee
O to Be Like Thee!
Make Me a Blessing
Draw Me Nearer
Revive Thy Work
Lead Me Gently Home, Father
Cleanse Me

If we are going to worship God in song we have to use songs that are truly worshipful.

A proper selection of songs and hymns is therefore basic. The song leader must understand the purpose of the various songs and hymns and make a wise, Spirit-led choice for each service.

8. SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Those who are in charge of the church's music must have spiritual discernment so they can select godly songs and reject those that are worldly and that appeal to the flesh. One of the chief ways that contemporary music enters churches is through the specials. I witnessed this on a recent preaching trip to 12 churches in three countries. About half of the churches allowed special music that was at least mildly contemporary. In each of these cases, the congregational music was traditional, while the special music was contemporary. I learned that the men in charge of the music did not know how to discern contemporary music.

A friend wrote recently, "'In Christ Alone' is a song that has been sung several times at our church. This song was popularized by Michael English (CCM) and was written by Shawn Craig of the CCM group Philips, Craig and Dean. It takes a strong pastor and a strong song leader to help guard from the wrong music coming in." (We have addressed this in a video presentation entitled "Learning to Distinguish between Sacred and Contemporary Styles of Music," which is available from Way of Life Literature.)

9. PATIENCE AND HUMILITY

The following suggestions were given to me by Vince Londini:

"In my 10-years as a song leader, and at times a choir director and ensemble leader, I found that 'working with people' was an important skill. With regard to leadership, instead of being demanding or simply expecting, patiently work with the pianist. Plan ahead and give the numbers to your pianist well in advance. Encourage your pianist. If there's credit to dole out or blame to assign, take the blame for yourself and dole out the credit to the musicians. Too often I've seen a song leader stop, stare, or comment when the pianist made a mistake which subsequently embarrassed the leader. Don't take your embarrassment out on the musician. Be flexible and don't draw attention to others' mistakes (as if to make sure that everyone knows the mistake wasn't yours). Better yet, learn not to be embarrassed. Kill your pride, and let accidents and mistakes roll off of you graciously. A gracious attitude toward mistakes encourages the musicians to keep trying, knowing that a mistake or two isn't the end of the world. When I first started song leading, the pianist at my home church was very unskilled (having just taken up the piano) and very uncertain about what skills she had. She would often get the timing wrong. For a time, I picked only songs she felt comfortable playing, and at times my arms waved in submission to her timing. We learned to sing it her way, without any public comment or criticism from me. I just tried to work graciously with whatever happened. As her skill improved, I could point out the timing issues, which she could now properly address. Because her heart was dedicated to serving the Lord, she practiced and practiced until she became a good church pianist. But, in the beginning I submitted myself to her and worked with her within her abilities, to help her get up to speed. It was an important lesson for me, as a young man, to submit to others rather than lord over them."

10. LIBERTY AND DIVERSITY

Too many churches are stuck in a rut with their song services. Variety is the spice of life. You don't have to look far in creation to see that God is a God of diversity and variety.

Suggestions for Introducing Variety into a Song Service

New songs should be introduced regularly and then sung frequently until they become an integral part of the church family's ever-enlarging song repertoire. In recent years Majesty Music published a new hymnbook which contains many beautiful songs which were written in the last few decades. (For the address for Majesty Music see the aforementioned article "Helpful Resources on Music" at the Way of Life web site.) This music is contemporary in the sense that it is new but it is not contemporary in style. (We must warn that some of the new *Patch the Pirate* children's tapes are, in our opinion, moving in the direction of contemporary sounds.)

Pastor David Earnhart says: "For many years we have used the Chorus of the Month. And don't forget the 'old songs.' I have often used songs like 'Thank You Lord for Saving My Soul.' Last year many raised their hands to indicate they did not know that song (even if it was 'old hat' to us old-timers!). This brings new Christians into the 'common fold' of music shared by Christians over many miles, and even generations."

Pastor Don Williams, Believers Baptist Church in Winona Lake, Indiana, says: "As for learning new songs, my family regularly picks out a new song from our hymnal and works on learning it for a couple weeks. Then we introduce it to the congregation as a special and begin to sing it in the song services. Our church has learned a lot of new songs that way."

Singing Scripture is a wonderful way to praise the Lord and edify the saints. During the Sunday evening services, for example, some churches sing Scripture songs. Two sources for these are North County Baptist Church, 221 W. 9th Ave., Escondido, CA 92027 and Tri-City Baptist Church, 4500 Selsa Rd., Blue Springs, MO 64015. Not only do these introduce variety within the music program, but nothing surpasses the actual words and verses of Scripture for doctrinal purity.

Even the most familiar songs can be made more interesting by an imaginative change in the manner of presentation. For example, on some verses the accompanying musicians can drop out while the congregation sings A cappella. Or one verse can be sung by the women, then the next by the men. The choir, singing group, or soloist can be accompanied by the congregation in places. The timing of the song can be altered, etc., etc. The chorus can be sung with a little more enthusiasm and volume as the song progresses. There are endless means of singing old songs in new ways (without going contemporary).

The song service can also be spiced up with the multiplication of musical instruments. Some of the most enjoyable song services I have participated in have been those accompanied by small orchestras. The *Majesty Hymnal* offers complete orchestrations for each song in the volume.

CONCLUSION

I will conclude with these comments from Pastor Doug Hammett, Lehigh Valley Baptist Church, Emmaus, Pennsylvania: "Keep the service alive! A song leader who is anticipating meeting with the Lord in the service will display that in his countenance, tone of voice and attitude. It will catch fire with the people as well. Encourage the people to participate. Don't berate them, encourage them. Keep the service

warm! Speak to the people as friends. Don't be afraid to encourage one person by name, all the others will pay close attention to what you are saying to him. Keep a record of what you sing and don't get in a rut!!! Singing the same old songs all the time may be easy for you, but it will put the people to sleep mentally. Remember you are preparing for the preaching! Starting the service with lively music and bringing the mood to a thoughtful, reflective manner before the message is a good plan."

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